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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for administrator and lead teacher professional development based on revised standards of the National Staff Development Council. The program acted as a catalyst for improving professional development practices at school sites. The report also presents a preliminary evaluation of the process, which involved self-assessment conversations. The study was conducted at 16 school sites, selected to represent a variety of demographics. Following is a summary of evaluation findings based on interviews with participants 2 to 4 months after the conversations: (1) Participants recognized a need to focus on professional development standards emphasizing data-driven and research-based practices; (2) the self-assessment conversations were perceived by participants as valuable, particularly because of their impact on thinking and planning regarding professional development; (3) the conversation process could be improved by providing more preparation, explaining the framework of the conversation, clarifying and simplifying the language of the self-assessment rubric, and providing follow-up activities; and (4) the conversations appear to have had a positive impact on certain areas within the affective domain. The report also includes suggestions for follow-up activities and recommendations to assess the actual effects of the conversations on professional development practices and student achievement. (WFA)

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Overhauling Professional Development:

Self-Assessment Conversations to Initiate Reform

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Abstract

Professional development practices in schools have been changing recently, particularly with the mandates regarding professional development through *No Child Left Behind*. In 2001, the National Staff Development Council revised their standards of professional development to shift thinking in this area and reflect the changing needs of schools, students, faculty, and administrators. The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of a program based on the revised standards that acts as a catalyst for improving professional development practices at school sites, entitled Self-Assessment Conversations in Professional Development, and to conduct a preliminary formative evaluation on this process.

Self-Assessment Conversations in Professional Development were conducted at 16 school sites, selected to represent a variety of demographics. Approximately two to four months after the conversations, administrators at each school site were interviewed. The following is a summary of the evaluation findings based on the interview responses: (a) the initial round of mean ratings from the self-assessment rubric suggest that participants recognize a need to focus upon professional development standards emphasizing data-driven and research-based practices; (b) the self-assessment conversations were perceived by participants as being valuable, particularly because of their impact on thinking and planning regarding professional development; (c) the conversation process could be improved by providing more advanced preparation, explaining the framework of the conversation, clarifying and simplifying the language on the self-assessment rubric, and providing a variety of follow-up activities; and (d) the conversations appear to have had positive impact on certain areas within the affective domain.

Suggestions for follow-up activities are included, and additional evaluation to ascertain the actual effects of the conversations on professional development practices and student achievement is recommended.

Overhauling Professional Development:

Self-Assessment Conversations to Initiate Reform

Professional development practices need to change. The National Staff Development Council (2001) states that although "staff development has been synonymous with workshops, courses, and presentations by 'experts,' . . . today we know that professional learning can take many forms" (p. 2). Hilliard (1997) argues that teachers need to be more empowered to demand structures and practices in professional development that deviate from the standard routines. Collective learning by an entire faculty that promotes school change among the school community is essential (Lambert, 1998). No longer are single-session workshops seen as a productive or effective means of professional development; rather, professional development should be an ongoing collaborative effort among faculty members, with emphasis on student needs and learning as the driving focus (Hord, 1997).

In response to the research regarding the shifting paradigms in professional development practices, the National Staff Development Council (2001) revised their standards for effective professional development to reflect the changing needs of students, schools, and school communities. The revised standards focus on three primary strands: context standards, process standards, and content. Within these strands, new ways of thinking regarding professional development encourage educators to realize the importance of learning communities while aligning staff development practices with system needs, to understand that quality programming is data-driven and research-based, and to recognize the relationship between quality teaching and student achievement. Among some school sites, these standards appear to be a major departure from traditional

thinking. How then can professional development leaders begin to initiate an understanding of effective practices among school-level educators? The purpose of this study is to provide participants with an overview of a program that acts as a catalyst for improving professional development practices at the school site.

Program Description

Learning leaders, comprised of administrators and lead teachers, from 16 schools were involved in self-assessment conversations regarding professional development standards, planning and practices, facilitated by educators trained on the NSDC's revised standards. The 16 schools involved in this pilot study were selected to represent varying demographics. Schools represented a mix of size, grade level, location (rural versus urban versus suburban), and systems with varying socio-economic community bases.

In order to make these conversations organized and systematic, a rubric was developed by a team of educators with expertise in professional development. This rubric was based on NSDC standards, and it acted as the primary mechanism to educate faculties on these revised standards, initiate conversations about professional development practices, and guide the overall self-assessment conversations. Based on the fact that the full extensive rubric, covering all 12 standards presented by NSDC, was too consuming and cumbersome to manage in a single session with teacher leaders, administrators from Alabama Best Practices Center opted to focus a second shortened version of the rubric on the following four strands of professional development: Data-Driven, Research-Based, Quality Teaching, and Learning Communities. These four strands of professional development were covered in every self-assessment conversation that took place during this pilot study.

Prior to the actual conversation and visitation with program facilitators, an administrator from Alabama Best Practices called school administrators to request their participation in the program. At that time, the procedures and purpose of the visit were discussed, and the school administrator was asked to select a team of teacher leaders to be involved, typically representing faculty members from a variety of grade levels and content areas. Copies of the self-assessment rubric and a glossary of terms were sent in advance of the conversations to prompt thinking and reflection among the teachers regarding professional development practices at the school prior to the actual conversation.

Upon first visiting the school, members of the school faculty led the program facilitators through a guided tour of the facility. Then the self-assessment conversation followed, typically spanning a 2-hour session. The self-assessment conversations were scheduled both during the actual school day and during after-school sessions, at the convenience and recommendation of the principal. Either a principal and/or assistant principal was present during the sessions. During the actual conversation, program facilitators led the school leaders through a series of items defined within the four-scale rubric, encouraging discussion of standards and an authentic assessment of the school's current professional development practices.

Faculty members rated their school's current professional development practices on a scale of 0 to 4 (4 being the most favorable rating of exemplary) based on the aforementioned standards: data-driven, research-based, quality teaching, and learning communities. The faculty members would use finger ratings to provide their assessments of the scales, and the session facilitator averaged and recorded these individual ratings. Variance in ratings among participants often sparked discussion about definitions of

terms and provision of examples of the scale at the school site, potentially deepening the participants' understanding of the professional development standards.

Evaluation Method

Means for each scale of the self-assessment rubric were identified and observed for patterns of self-assessment responses among the various faculties. Approximately two to four months after the conversations, an open-ended, semi-structured interview protocol was developed by the outside evaluator and reviewed by project directors, facilitators, and outside evaluators to ensure content validity. The interview protocol was designed to generate responses focusing on two primary themes: improving the self-assessment conversation process and determining impact of the conversations on professional development practices at the school level. Using the approved protocol, the evaluator conducted telephone interviews with 16 learning leaders (one per site), usually principals or assistant principals from each school. Each interview, which lasted from 15 to 35 minutes, was taped, transcribed, coded and analyzed for patterns of responses. Following models of interview research (Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Charmaz, 2002; Tierney & Dilley, 2002), the data analysis was inductive. After transcribing the interviews, the responses were read, reread, coded in margins, and highlighted for response patterns in order to interpret themes associated with the two driving research questions regarding program process and program impact.

Initial Ratings and Responses to the Self-Assessment Rubric

During the conversations, the participants were asked to rate 12 items (3 items per theoretical scale) regarding professional development. In order to prompt an organized analysis of the data, measures of internal consistency per scale were calculated. Table 1 displays the reliabilities per scale on the rubric (see Table 1). Using a criteria of .60, the

range of reliabilities was determined to be sufficient, and the separate 12 items of the rubric were collapsed into four dominant scales, allowing a meaningful analysis of the initial self-assessment data for the 16 schools.

Table 1

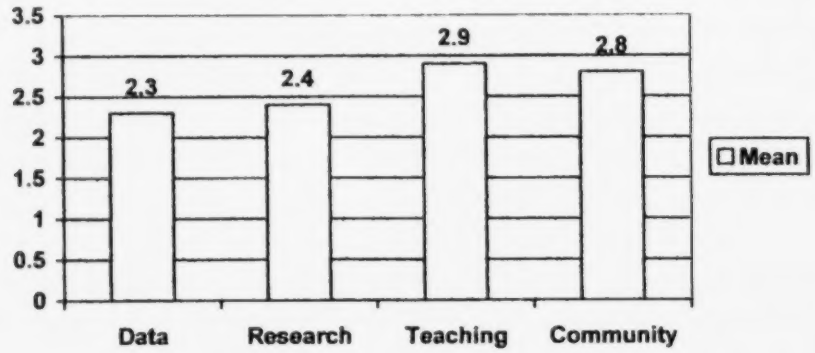
Reliability Coefficients per Scale for the Self-Assessment Rubric Version II

	Data-Driven	Research-Based	Quality Teaching	Learning Communities
Alpha	.74	.95	.85	.93

Observing patterns in the means, it can be noted that the mean ratings were low (slightly higher than the basic proficiency rating defined by a response of 2) for all four scales, possibly suggesting that faculty members involved in these conversations recognized a need for reform in practices in order to align them more closely with NSDC's current standards of effective professional development.

Graph 1

Means per Scale for the Staff Development Self-Assessment Rubric Version II



In addition, it appears as though the teachers and administrators participating in the self-assessment conversations feel that their current professional development

practices focus upon the importance of improving the quality of their teaching (M=2.95) and the formation of learning communities (M=2.80), more so than basing practices on data-driven (M=2.32) or research-based (2.42) programming. This finding alone suggests that follow-up to the conversations may need to focus clearly on these two areas of improvement for professional development at the school site.

Recurring Themes in Interview Responses

During the course of the interviews, definite patterns of responses emerged (see Table 2.)

Table 2

Prominent Themes Emerging from Interviews

Themes	N	%
Process: More Preparation Prior to Visit	7	44%
Process: Validity of Faculty Responses	7	44%
Process: Lengthen Time of Conversation	4	25%
Process: Clarify and Simplify Language on Rubric	4	25%
Outcome: Validation of PD Practices	8	50%
Outcome: Collaboration as Learning Community	8	50%
Outcome: Teacher Empowerment	8	50%
Outcome: Recognition of Faculty Expertise	8	50%
Outcome: Connecting Quality Teaching to Student Achievement	7	44%
Outcome: Program Alignment	6	38%
Plans: Job-Embedded PD	11	69%
Plans: Data-Driven PD	11	69%
Plans: Study Groups	7	44%
Follow-Up: Post Meeting with Team Representative	12	75%
Follow-Up: Engage Full Faculty in Process	6	38%
Follow-Up: Connect with Other Schools	6	38%
Follow-Up: Funding Assistance	5	31%

Responses to the Self-Assessment Process

Every interview respondent viewed the self-assessment conversation as a positive and meaningful event. For instance one respondent stated the following: "I think it is a very good process, I do, and I certainly am a believer . . . It is truly what we all are about,

and if we want to effectively effect some change, then we are going to have to do a better job with professional development." Because the process called upon the collaborative responses of the teachers during the conversations, principals noted that they found the experience to be personally enlightening, in that it helped them to understand the views and perspectives of their teachers. One respondent made the following comment: "I am being honest. Because so much good came out of doing the self-assessment, it let me know where I needed to be as a leader." There was unanimous consent that the self-assessment conversations were beneficial, powerful, and meaningful.

In terms of changing the actual process, many of the respondents (44%) felt that more comprehensive preparation on the part of the program administrators was necessary prior to the conversation. In spite of receiving a preliminary phone call, the glossary of terms, and the self-assessment rubric in advance, school leaders were concerned that the teachers were still unclear as to the procedures, expectations, and goals of the process. For instance, one respondent stated the following: "I don't think we really had a clear understanding of what it was we were going to do." Another respondent explained that "a coming together meeting before that process would have been helpful." One respondent stated that the facilitators "had a concept of what they wanted to get across and what they were after, but our teachers just were not in tune with the same concepts, so I think maybe more time spent mapping out the framework of exactly what they wanted would be a little more helpful." Specifically, two of the respondents admitted not understanding whether the self-assessment was intended for the individual level, the school level, or the system-wide level, noting that this distinction could have affected the overall ratings for that particular self-assessment conversation. Another respondent explained the following:

"I don't think I had a clear understanding of exactly where they were going with all of this. And my teachers were kind of cautious at first to talk and dialogue with them."

As suggested by the prior comment, due to a lack of initial understanding regarding the goals of the process, many of the school leaders were concerned that their faculty who were selected to participate in the self-assessment conversation were not completely valid in their ratings and responses. According to various respondents, this lack of validity in ratings could have possibly caused both inflation and deflation of ratings. For instance, one school leader stated the following: "I think it was really difficult to get the teachers to be honest. They wanted to portray us in such a positive light that I am not sure they graded us as hardly or as harshly as I would have" (inflation). Another school leader stated that "some of our responses were not what they should have been because we just didn't understand what we were being asked" (deflation). Although one respondent worried that her presence as an administrator was affecting the ratings of the teachers in the self-assessment, the majority of the respondents who discussed this theme were concerned that a lack of understanding regarding how the self-assessment data would be used caused mostly inflation in ratings, while an inability to grasp the concepts on the rubric caused deflation. In order to assuage the fears of the faculty, a respondent suggested the following:

> A rapport be built between the institution that you are assessing or talking to, besides just a one time first time visit, and you do the assessment, and you have the discussion then, if you have established some kind of bond.

Other respondents also suggested that the actual self-assessment conversation occur as the second visit to the school, after clarifying the program goals and process. In general, the respondents felt that assurance that the data would not be turned over to other

departments or used for comparative or possibly punitive reasons would be beneficial to encouraging honesty of ratings among the faculty.

Two other potential areas for program reform involved the length of the actual self-assessment conversation and the clarity of the language on the rubric. One quarter of the respondents commented respectively on these two themes. The four respondents who commented on length would like to see more time dedicated to the actual session (i.e., "The meeting lasted about two hours, and it could have lasted all day long, and I think that would have been a good thing" or "I would have liked to have had more time. I felt a little bit rushed" or "It is just something we wanted to continue, and I wish we had a little more time"). The four respondents who commented on the clarity of the rubric described the language as "difficult to really grasp the ideas," "kind of hard to understand," "hard" and "on a collegiate level," and "a little confusing." All four of these respondents recommended that examples of professional development practices as anchors per rating would have assisted in understanding the overall concepts and ratings within the rubric ("More concrete examples to help define the concepts in the rubric"). Another final suggestion for program reform mentioned by many of the respondents was the hope to involve the full faculty in the self-assessment conversation. This theme is discussed in greater detail in the section of the report that highlights follow-up suggestions.

Outcomes of the Self-Assessment Conversations

Upon looking at Table 2, it is apparent from the listing of immediate outcomes that the separate themes have a combined effect on promoting a positive school climate. Validation of current best practices in professional development, collaboration as a community of learners, teacher empowerment, and recognition of faculty expertise are all positive elements related to school climate that were immediate results of the

conversations, allowing the program to be deemed successful and worthwhile by the respondents. Although the pilot program cannot claim actual changes in professional development practices or increases in student achievement at this time, it can be stated confidently from the interview responses that the program had an impact in the affective domain as related to positive attitudinal and cognitive changes among faculty members. This, in turn, could possibly cause long-term effects on other areas of instruction.

Regarding validation, many of the school leaders (50%) stated that their faculties felt that the self-assessment conversation was a positive and affirming experience: "I think it helped validate for us that some of the things that were ongoing here . . . certainly did have merit." Similarly, another respondent stated the following:

> My impression of the major impact as far as teachers go was an affirmation that they were headed in the right direction and a commitment to fine tune that and to continue to do that.

Many other comments describing impact of the program were sprinkled with similar words such as "encouraging," "validating," and "affirming."

In addition to realizing that they were "geared in the right direction," many of the respondents (50%) stated that the process itself called upon a sense of collaboration among teachers as a community of learners. Again, this helped to improve school climate. One respondent noted that because the process called for "collaboration among teachers," it helped in "establishing our community as a school." As a direct result of the self-assessment conversation, one principal recognized the importance of hearing multiple perspectives of teachers and forming professional development teams to meet the school's needs. Another respondent stated that the process allowed her faculty the "time to come back and, as a learning community, talk about our plans." Later she said

that the time during the conversation initiated an opportunity and need for her faculty to establish "what we wanted as our collective goals and our plans."

As intimated by the notion that the self-assessments "allowed the teachers to look deeper at themselves," many of the respondents (50%) felt that the conversations provided the teachers with an immediate sense of empowerment. One respondent indicated that the self-assessment conversation increased teachers' awareness that they can demand their professional development needs based on their student achievement data, rather than waiting for school administrators to mandate professional development programming which may or may not be relevant. Another respondent stated that the self-assessment conversation allowed the teachers "to feel ownership into the plan." The following quotation regarding the conversations was made by one of the school administrators:

> The exciting thing about all of this is that I see teachers becoming empowered through acquisition of this knowledge, and then the skills of implementing strategies that they see are being effective and are affecting the data, and just seeing themselves as decision makers instead of looking to the principal all the time.

Similar to this comment, another respondent stated that "one of the main things that came out of that was the teachers taking ownership of their professional development." Although not an intentional outcome of this program, those involved and interviewed felt strongly that the self-assessment conversation was shifting the perspectives that teachers had about professional development, thus empowering them to make decisions about their personal practices.

Corresponding to this sense of empowerment was the recognition by half of the respondents that instructional expertise lies within the teachers at their own school site. Instead of going off site to seek assistance in professional development, the educators involved in the interviews discussed the importance of programs such as peer coaching and sharing of information among faculty. One administrator recognized the power of "developing experts within our school." Another noted the number on her faculty with advanced degrees and training that could be called upon for their knowledge base. The interview comments highlighted thoughts of asking coworkers for assistance rather than going off site, sharing extended studies and effective strategies at the school level, or assisting colleagues with collaboratively assessing student data.

Another unsolicited result of the self-assessment conversations was the clear connection that the administrators were making in the interviews between quality teaching and student achievement. Forty-four percent of the respondents made comments that clearly linked professional development to quality teaching to student achievement. For instance, when asked what kind of outcomes she expected as a result of her school's involvement in the self-assessment conversations, one administrator stated the following: "Better teaching. Higher SAT scores. Morale." A logical sequencing of thoughts was occurring for this administrator. Another administrator stated that her vision was "that teachers would be facilitators of student learning" with professional development acting as the catalyst to spark this process. Again, in reference to outcomes of the self-assessment conversations, a final example of this connection of teacher practice to student achievement is made in the following quotation:

> I think our teachers will take on a whole new positive attitude toward trying some new and innovative ideas, and I think our students are going to benefit because I

> want more hands-on, more active roles on our student part, and I think this professional development is going to help me implement that.

These comments suggest that administrators are thinking of professional development in ways that deviate from the traditional views, making clear connections between student needs and professional development practices.

One final theme that emerged as an outcome of the self-assessment conversations was the sense of holistically bringing together multiple programs into one philosophical framework. Many respondents (38%) talked about the sense of alignment that the conversations brought them, rather than program fragmentation. Some respondents almost sounded relieved that there was a theoretical framework on which to hang all their various programming mandates. According to some respondents, the standards for professional development aligned with SACS accreditation, the Alabama Reading Initiative, Alabama Courses of Study, PEPE, and other state and system-wide goals. These respondents noted a sense of it all making sense together and that various programs "aligned rather well." One respondent explained that the conversation initiated a system-wide meeting of all science teachers to align the Science Course of Study:

> We aligned everything, a pacing guide, all the way from fifth grade up through twelth grade, and that was major. It was something major that came from the self-assessment that we did.

Note that this administrator views multiple grade level meetings to discuss the Science Course of Study as a clear demonstration of professional development, with the needs of the students at each grade level driving the meeting. Later in the interview, she stated that "my main benefit was that maybe the teachers felt more in tune with the alignment, and I know my students benefited from it in that I know they have the competencies met." This

comment serves to exemplify multiple outcomes. First, the self-assessment conversations appeared to help administrators align programs, and second, the conversations regarding professional development have taken a natural shift toward student-centered, data-driven decisions.

Plans for Changing Practices in Professional Development

Because the self-assessment conversations occurred in the spring, relatively late in the academic year, few of the teacher leaders (13%) had the opportunity to make any changes in their current professional development practices at the school site prior to the end of the school year. However, a strong majority (94%) of the respondents stated that the conversations had affected their thinking, planning, and vision of professional development at their schools. The plans for changes in school improvement varied somewhat radically per school, depending upon the needs of the students and teachers. However, although no reference to the four standards covered by the self-assessment conversations was ever directly made in the interview protocol, the actual interviews were abundant with samples of how the conversations impacted the respondents' thinking regarding professional development in those areas. A majority of the respondents (69%) made references to planning more data-driven professional development, and equally 69% referenced plans that would increase the amount of on-site, job-embedded training. A popular format for upcoming professional development practices included on-site study groups mentioned by 44% of the respondents. These practices were praised by respondents as allowing small groups to organize according to the specificity of their students' needs (data-driven), and they were noted as providing possible on-site training during the regular academic day (job-embedded).

Regarding data-driven instruction, when asked what their upcoming plans were, many of the respondents referenced the tests and scores that were informing their planning for professional development in the upcoming year. For instance, two schools were planning on providing on-site assistance on the Alabama Writing Assessment, due to the recognition of a need in that area as demonstrated through low test scores. One respondent stated the following: "Everything we do, data drives all the decisions we make here that impacts student achievement." Another administrator stated the following:

> Our vision is to be more purely data-driven in our professional development. Our goal this year is to make sure that all the assessments we are using are actually getting at data that should be addressed. We've actually dropped some assessments that we think have been assessments that are just going through the motions or aren't giving us data that we can disaggregate and analyze to point us to professional development.

Even though the respondents were never asked directly to address a specific standard from the self-assessment, the data-driven notion appeared to have had a great impact on the thinking of the respondents regarding professional development. When considering this trend from the interviews in conjunction with the fact that the data-driven scale was one of the lower scales on the self-assessment rubric, it is not surprising that the administrators are attempting to improve in that area. This finding intimates that the participants in the self-assessment conversation are making a clear and direct connection between their needs as defined by the rubric and their future plans for professional development. The following statement captures that connection:

> The vision here is to have far more professional development that is directly related to children's learning or to the students' learning, just as a result of that

particular self-assessment. I think we all need to focus more on student learning, and I think that came through there.

This respondent makes a direct parallel between the information they learned during the self-assessment conversation and how that information will be used to inform professional development practices.

Like the connection with data-driven professional development, the respondents also seemed to clearly shift thinking about professional development as on-site, job-embedded practices. Two of the respondents stated that they were already able to make changes to their practices by providing time for teachers during the day for "school-embedded professional learning." Common plans for changes in professional development among the majority of the respondents included organizing grade-level and mixed grade-level meetings during the day to provide an opportunity for coplanning and sequencing curricula. Plans for hiring substitutes to provide release time were shared by respondents in attempt at "redesigning our professional development to have more embedded professional development activities." In sum, the idea of providing more time during the actual academic day was a chord that was noted by many respondents when addressing plans to change staff development in the upcoming year.

Part of this change in thinking regarding data-driven and job-embedded professional development manifested itself in the form of study groups. Many of the administrators (44%) planned on providing time for study groups that were focusing on topics as indicated through their student data. Whether researching through book studies, current articles, or a sharing of practices, many administrators perceived this small group time as invaluable:

> Giving teachers small group time to read, discuss, think about, and then develop a plan. I do think there will have to be some whole group discussion, maybe in a faculty meeting where we bring together what different small groups have said, but I see professional development much like I saw reading instruction as a classroom teacher. There is time for one on one. There is time for small group.

Small group study sessions within the school site appear to be a format of choice among administrators in attaining individualized, data-driven, job-embedded professional development opportunities.

Follow-Up Activities and Recommendations

Unanimously, every respondent wanted to see some sort of follow up to the self-assessment conversation, in an effort to make the program an ongoing effort in assessing and improving professional development practices at the school site, rather than a single session without additional assistance for school development and growth. Although the recommendations varied, some definite patterns emerged.

A strong majority (75%) of the respondents wanted to see the self-assessment facilitator team, or a least a single representative from the facilitator team, come back to the school for at least one post meeting. The purpose of these post meetings, as defined by the respondents, varied. Some respondents wanted the facilitators to re-engage the same team of selected school leaders in the self-assessment conversations after a full year of potential change, for the sake of charting growth and improvement at the school site. Some of the respondents wanted a facilitator to sit down with the team of school leaders to share their expertise and help them plan professional development for the entire year, while some principals wanted the same form of assistance to them individually as learning leaders. Some of the respondents were hoping to get school-specific assistance

on a particular scale of the rubric, typically an area where the school team felt they had scored low, and finally, some of the respondents were hoping that trained facilitators would come back and share portraits and vignettes of successful best practices at other schools in order to motivate their faculties to adopt similar programs and practices.

Related to the idea of having the facilitator visit the school again for a meeting after the self-assessment session, many of the respondents (38%) would like to see a follow-up visit that involved completing the self-assessment conversation with the entire faculty rather than a limited number of teacher leaders. This particular follow-up directly corresponds to the earlier recommendation for change in the process that came from a number of respondents, requesting full faculty involvement in the conversations. Many respondents regretted not having full faculty input to involve a greater representative sampling of responses and perspectives:

> I think the thing that bothered me the most after the whole process was over was the fact that the whole faculty wasn't involved. I would have loved for everybody on the faculty to have heard and talked about the kind of things that these teachers talked about.

In response to this dilemma, a number of respondents suggested doing "a follow-up with the whole faculty."

Another recommendation from respondents (38%) involved having administrators and personnel from Alabama Best Practices Center act as the connectors or liaisons between schools, to assist in finding schools that were strong institutions of professional development for site visits and to establish a method of shared communication via a listserve or email. For instance, one respondent made the following comment:

> Be able to give us a day where we could go and benchmark other schools. It would be helpful for us, like our committee who did the self-assessment, to meet with another school's committee and to be able to compare and maybe to learn from each other.

In general, respondents wanted to "get insight into what other schools are doing," and they viewed personnel from this program as the connector to make that level of follow-up activity possible. Respondents were hoping "that we could be connected to schools that are similar to us or have the same needs" in an effort to problem solve methods to effectively improve student achievement through professional development practices.

The final follow-up request that was noted by 31% of the respondents was the need for additional funding. When asked about barriers to changes in current professional development practices, two themes emerged: need for funding and need for finding time within the instructional day. With this in mind, it is no surprise that additional assistance in the form of funding was requested as a follow-up to the program. A number of respondents expressed appreciation at the opportunity for grant applications that provided time for substitutes to free teachers for professional development activities, and other appreciated the grants related to the development of modules of effective practices per standards. Other respondents made statements such as, "We just need more funding for our teachers if we expect students outcomes to increase" or "Maybe make some money available for teachers that want to go to professional development activities in the summer." In some cases, respondents recognized the limited funding available, but they hoped that a follow-up would involve the publication of sources of funding linked to professional development, with training in how to access and apply for those funds.

Concluding Thoughts and Efforts for Future Reform

The self-assessment conversations appear to have had a strong impact on teacher and administrator thinking regarding professional development practices. Instead of thinking in traditional ways regarding stand-alone workshops where teachers are sent off campus to a conference or isolated setting, the participants in this pilot study have initiated a shift in their thinking to encompass new paradigms of professional development. They feel that teachers are empowered to direct the course of their individual professional development. They feel that student data should inform their professional development practices. They recognize the expertise within their own buildings for assistance in professional development, and they value the time with colleagues and students in actual real-world settings that will most directly affect instruction.

In spite of the possible program benefits, this pilot evaluation still points to areas of program reform. Certainly, as noted by respondents, additional preparation time to clarify the purpose, goals, and use of data for the participants will strengthen the program. In addition, extending the single self-assessment conversation into an ongoing program with additional follow-up activities could enhance the program, as it would keep it from being a single-shot workshop in professional development. Follow-up activities that ask participants to revisit the rubric, share self-assessment data with other faculty at the school site, and share effective practices with faculties from other school sites were all expressed as meaningful methods of follow-up to the single self-assessment conversation.

Although the intangible benefits to shifts in thinking, improvement in climate, and teacher empowerment can be immense and hold the potential to greatly impact practices

and, ultimately, instruction, the pilot evaluation, at this time and in its current form, cannot purport to claim a significant difference in actual professional development practices at the school sites due to the self-assessment conversations. Instead, a more detailed analysis that tracks and documents the initial professional development practices at a school prior to engaging in the conversation and then statistically compares the nature of the practices at least a year after the conversation could more accurately capture the impact on programming at the school site. Comparative studies that look at the nature of professional development practices among schools that have engaged in the self-assessment conversation as opposed to those who have not engaged in the self-assessment conversation would also be extremely telling. Finally, one of the most critical aspects for future long-term study would be to assess the student achievement data over time, to verify if, indeed, changes in professional development thinking, planning, and practices at a school has had a direct student achievement data.

With this degree of rigor driving the program evaluation, avenues of program improvement could be visited, enhancing the self-assessment conversations as a powerful vehicle for educational reform in professional development practices.

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